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RELATION OF NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE TO STATE AND LOCAL COMMITTEES

BY EDWARD W. FROST,
Chairman, Wisconsin Child Labor Committee.

Believing in this future and that the men and women who wisely predicted from its remarkably effective work in the few years of its existence and from the growing need of its aid in the development of state and local work, we are at the beginning of a movement full of promise for the generations to come.

Believing in this future and that the men and women who founded the National Child Labor Committee builded better than they knew, I think the basis of relationship between the national committee and its state and local committees should be as definitely determined as possible, and lines laid down along which there shall be steady development.

I take a special interest in this question from the fact that it was my privilege to be a member of the Committee of Twenty-one of the Young Men's Christian Associations of North America, which sat for three years at a crisis in the association's history to determine upon a permanent policy in the relations of the national committee to the state and local associations. Some will remember this historic discussion and the debate with which it closed. Many know how remarkably it all worked out for permanent good.

Mutual Dependence

The real relation between the national and local child labor committees cannot be stated better than in the resolution on the general question of relationship adopted by the Young Men's Christian Association at the International Conference at Buffalo in 1904, as follows:

"Efficient state and provincial organizations have long been recognized as essential factors in the successful development of the local associations; and an important part of the work of the International Committee has been to establish and assist these organiza-

tions. This policy becomes increasingly important with the development of the association work. It is, therefore, the duty of the agents of the International Committee, when working in fields having state or provincial organizations to aid and strengthen those organizations. It is equally the duty of the agents of the state and provincial organizations to support and aid the agents, or the state and provincial organizations to support and aid the International Committee in its relation to the associations and in its work for the North American association brotherhood."

Most of us who represent state child labor committees come each year to the national conference with a strong feeling of regret that so few states and cities have been wise and earnest enough to organize and maintain self-supporting and forceful committees. This annual regret has not yet strongly influenced us all during the year which elapses between national conferences. We are, as we think, rightfully proud of the gains of the last ten years in the making and enforcement of Wisconsin child labor laws, but the Wisconsin Child Labor Committee is scarcely more than a name and the work is done by a few earnest members who confess that they would be wiser if they gave more strength to building up a stronger committee. We greatly need more frequent visits from the secretaries of the national committee, and the uplift and stimulus such visits bring.

While we would frankly object to any attempt to dictate to us any particular form of policy or to over-rule local judgment on the form of laws which should be presented to the legislature, and while we insist that the decision on local matters be left to men and women on the ground, we ask and need a closer connection with the national committee and more help in all save financial ways.

The situation presents to-day in Wisconsin as elsewhere no problem of relationship. For the present, at least, and for a considerable time to come, the only danger will be that the national committee will not have men and money enough to foster and develop state and local committees. It is and it should be the well-defined policy of the national committee to encourage local autonomy in every way, to build up in cities and states child labor committees worthy the name, and to bring about as rapidly as possible the employment by state and local committees of expert secretaries on good salaries. Let us follow the example set us by the foremost states.

Interstate Organization

One of the most helpful things is the development of the group work for states, such as is done by Mr. Lord and Mr. Clopper, and in a most difficult field by Mr. McKelway, as district secretaries of the national committee. Many western states are calling for such grouping and such secretaries. Years of study and familiarity with child labor problems in Wisconsin and elsewhere convince me that the conspicuous weakness of most state and local committees lies in the fact that we have not raised money to employ trained men and women to investigate, to speak with authority, and to instruct the public wisely. Our work is too often left to a few men and women who volunteer their services and pay their own expenses. Such men and women too often find it easier to give their own time and money than to teach and inspire others to give themselves. This work must be put upon a paid and expert basis. It is the old story of the shortcomings of volunteer service.

Raising Funds

As soon as a state or local child labor committee is strongly organized and able to raise anything beyond the necessary expenses of the first paid secretary employed by it, a contribution to the national committee should become a part of its modest budget. Nor should the national committee be requested to refrain from soliciting money in the state or city of such child labor committee unless the local committee is strong enough to make a substantial contribution to the work of the national committee. But no such solicitations should, at least in the earlier years of such state or local committee's existence, be made by the national committee without advising with the local committee. In this way there will be no harmful duplication of lists and no double demands upon local contributors who are unaware of the relation between the committees.

The Specialist

In child labor reform, as in other things, our age demands specialization. Child labor is no longer a new story. If I can judge by personal observation, the public has turned to newer and more startling things and has apparently a comfortable and easy-going conviction that "some one"—that shadowy person on whom we unload any inconvenient duties—is looking after the interests of work-

ing children. So long as our present form of government endures we must largely depend upon local initiative, and this means building up, under the wise and intelligent guidance of the national committee, an infant industry—if the expression may be pardoned here—which will soon rise and stand upon its feet.

In my own city there began a year or more ago an effort for wiser co-operation in philanthropic work and for improvement in methods. For many years earnest men and women, cumbered with much philanthropic serving, had planned and hoped for such a movement. At last by rare good fortune a woman of fine training and high ability was secured on an adequate salary to give her entire time to the furtherance of co-operation and improvement. In three months a basis for permanent and lasting work was found and more real ground gained than in years of zealous and patient endeavor. If the Wisconsin Child Labor Committee could to-day engage such a secretary it would be of incalculable benefit to the working children of Wisconsin. We could in any state or any large city raise the money to engage such a secretary if we had the burden sufficiently laid on our hearts.

I hope the national committee will keep at us until every state and every considerable city has a child labor committee which raises money to employ trained secretaries, to make systematic investigations and carry on a campaign to arouse public sentiment. We all know the time for arousing a sane and helpful sentiment by painting lurid pictures of the sufferings of the working children is past. In our endeavor to improve laws we are confronted by able and well-organized opposition, and accurate statistics are demanded of us. We cannot get them without paid service and a *quiet* investigation and close study. But it is not right or sensible to expect the national committee to raise funds for local secretaries or local investigation. Even \$2,000 a year raised in a city or state for the salary and modest expenses of a trained man or woman will do more in large cities and in many states than a host of public meetings.

We must look to the national committee for inspiration, and the national committee, in its turn, must look to the larger cities and the older states for the necessary funds.

It is pleasant to see that all over the country men and women of broad minds and large resources are responding to the special call of the National Child Labor Committee. Many are of such national

reputation that their names speak for themselves, but in the last analysis we who in humbler fashion represent the committee in our own states are the ones to whom the national committee must look for arousing local sympathy and securing large contributions. It is manifestly unfair to throw upon the eastern states and a few large cities, as has been done in the past, so great a part of the financial burden.